



Nicci Maxwell

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Location: Kisoro, Uganda



What I do: Providing paediatric and neonatal medical care to the community, and providing training, mentorship and support to local healthcare workers.

Dear friends,

It's hard to believe that the end of the year is already almost upon us. Last Christmas really doesn't seem that long ago. The past year has not been without its challenges but there is also plenty to give thanks for. As the year draws to a close, I will endeavour to give you a quick roundup of all that's been happening here in Kisoro.

First, as always, is Potter's Village. Although my hours of work in the medical centre have decreased quite a bit over the year with the addition of a new clinical officer to the team, I continue to offer about 30–35 hours each week, including a night on call, to this busy service. I still enjoy the interesting clinical challenges that seem to come along almost every day. The clinical officers, alongside the senior nursing team and Idah, the project administrator, are doing an excellent job in managing all but the most medically complex situations and, in my opinion, are needing me less and less. Praise God – that's exactly what we hoped would happen!

My monthly visit to the small diocesan health centre in Rutaka seems to be becoming more productive, particularly as one of the clinical officers there seems quite enthusiastic about learning from me as we see patients together. I enjoy my visits to Rutaka and am encouraged by the progress that seems to be happening with the support of the diocesan health co-ordinator and a UK-based charity, HealthTree Uganda.

The highlight of most weeks is my involvement in the Batwa community of Mikingo Village. The community continues to make progress in the areas of health, agriculture and education. I am privileged to work alongside Winnie from the Diocese of Muhabura and the Australia-based Kisoro Group. I am now frequently greeted by members of that community as “our doctor” or “our white person”, which always makes me smile! It brings me such joy to spend time with the Mikingo Batwa community and witness the positive changes within the community, particularly in the number of people choosing to present themselves or their children for healthcare and the enthusiasm for school attendance among the children.

In contrast to the sheer joy of the Batwa work, my time at the government hospital continues to challenge and frustrate. The lack of resources and staff motivation make it very difficult to see any sustained progress, despite spending up to two days each week there. I have to take heart that maybe one day, somewhere, something I have said or taught might be remembered at the right moment to improve



With Mattia and Maddalena, friends from Italy who previously worked in Kisiizi.

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the outcome for a baby, but most days it's just exhausting! Please pray for breakthroughs in this difficult area.

Over the past year I have been invited to provide regular weekly teaching sessions to midwives caring for newborns at the nearby Catholic Hospital and to some of the medical staff working in the refugee camp. Each session lasts about an hour and we cover the basics of neonatal care and resuscitation, as well as selected paediatric topics at the request of those attending. I am always thrilled when new staff ask if they can come along and I am often both surprised and delighted at the interesting and insightful questions

that they ask. I also get asked to review and advise on sick paediatric and neonatal patients in both places.

The refugee work will probably wind down over the coming months as many of the refugees have either been repatriated or resettled elsewhere in Uganda. The temporary camp, which housed up to 15,000 people earlier this year, has been almost completely dismantled, leaving around 2,000 people in the "old" camp. Sadly, we can expect further surges in refugee numbers as the fighting in Congo waxes and wanes in coming months, but hopefully nothing quite as dramatic as the influx earlier this year.

It's also been a busy year for travel. As COVID-19 restrictions around the world have relaxed, we have seen the return of tourism to Kisoro. This is a welcome boost for the local economy, which suffered hugely during the lockdowns. Please pray with us that the Ebola outbreak in central Uganda, which has spread to the capital, Kampala, is rapidly brought under control and will not cause widespread chaos and shutdowns again. More travel means more visitors to Potter's Village and other local projects. We have had visitors from the USA, UK, Italy, Canada and Kenya in recent weeks. Looking ahead, we are expecting at least two more sets of visitors before Christmas and then several more are in the diary in the first few months of the new year.

All of this activity has happened against a continuing background of post-Covid fatigue for me. I'm still finding I can't give 100 per cent without feeling completely wiped out the following day. I've also had more coughs, colds and tummy bugs than ever before and managed to injure my back. Despite having celebrated my 50th birthday in October, I'm pretty sure that it's mostly still Covid, rather than age, to blame! Please pray that I'll be back to full strength soon and that I will be able to manage my workload effectively to avoid becoming exhausted.

Your continued prayers and support have been a huge blessing to me and to the people I seek to serve during this year. Thank you!

I think all I have space for now is to wish you all a very blessed Christmas. May you know the peace and joy that Jesus brings this Christmas and throughout the new year.

With love to you all,

Nicci



Photos from top to bottom: Jimmy, a clinical officer at Rutaka, doing some health education for mothers waiting at immunisation clinic; A refugee mother and child in the grounds of Potter's Village; One of "my" beautiful Batwa children; Meet Idah, the fantastic administrator who ensures Potter's Village is running smoothly.



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